

STUDENTS AND ALUMNI DISCUSS FELLOWSHIP EXPERIENCES
AT A LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STUDIES PANEL LED BY
SPRINT FELLOW ARIANA PALOMO

Accelerating Innovation in Undergraduate Education

By Elizabeth Kellner Suneby '80

Over the past decade, new and enhanced policies and programs have ensured all students have access to engaged learning experiences.

Ariana Palomo '25 is headed to England on a Rhodes Scholarship to pursue master's degrees in refugee and forced migration studies and in global governance and diplomacy.

"Brown provided me with financial access, mentors, and experiences to shape a meaningful undergraduate journey and prepare me to study at Oxford," explains Palomo, a first-generation American from Mexico who grew up in Texas.

As a Brown undergraduate, Palomo took advantage of several opportunities to build both her skills and her professional portfolio. In summer 2022, she received a SPRINT Fellowship to intern with Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson in Dallas; the summer after, Palomo studied Arabic in Oman through

a Critical Language Scholarship. During the first semester of her junior year, she received an Undergraduate Teaching and Research Award (UTRA) with Professor Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve to research race and wrongful convictions in the criminal justice system. Building on these experiences, Palomo interned with the U.S. State Department in Washington, D.C. during summer 2024. Her educational journey reflects Brown's enhanced approach to supporting the undergraduate experience through a variety of programming built over the past decade.

"To meet the needs of an evolving student body, we continually adapt Brown's distinctive student-centered approach to undergraduate education," explains Rashid Zia '01, dean of the College since 2018, who concludes his term June 30, 2025, to return to research and teaching.

Brown has leveraged data and community feedback to launch or revise programs and policies to enrich the undergraduate experience for all — from providing financial support for the widest range of students, to expanding hands-on learning, research and teaching opportunities, to strengthening advising.

Expanding Experiential Learning

In 2021, the College boosted equitable access to research, teaching, and internship opportunities through an overhaul of its SPRINT/UTRA application and funding processes. Before the restructuring, about 300 undergraduates applied — mostly through word of mouth — and 200 UTRA awards were granted each summer. Since making all opportunities visible to all students, introducing need-based funding and expanding year-round support, participation has skyrocketed and now mirrors the composition of the student body. In 2024, SPRINT received 3,400 applications and made 1,300 awards. As of February 2025, the program received 5,000 applications.

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— Rashid Zia '01, Dean of the College

The College also introduced certificate programs in data fluency, engaged scholarship, entrepreneurship, intercultural competence, and migration studies. Certificates combine coursework and experiential learning to complement a student's concentration and equip them with 21st-century skills. In addition, Brown added concentrations in computational neuroscience, critical Native American and Indigenous studies, design engineering, and international and public affairs.

Leveling the Playing Field

About 12% of Brown undergraduates receive full scholarships, including room and board; and 50% of students on financial aid for tuition and fees also receive scholarships for living expenses. For many, the high cost of course

materials once necessitated undue tradeoffs, such as forgoing textbooks or enrollment in a class, reducing their meal plan, or working extra jobs.

To alleviate financial pressure, the College rolled out the Book/Course Material Support (BCMS) Program in 2020, providing complimentary textbooks to all students on aid through the Brown Bookstore. One student commented, "This program gave me the freedom to choose classes without concern of financial strain."

The College also launched Emergency GAP (E-GAP) Funds to support students facing unexpected financial burdens. One student's challenge often uncovers a systemic issue the College can address through policy change. For example, after students reached out to E-GAP for meal support during Senior Week when the dining halls were closed, the University modified the schedule to keep at least one hall open 364 days a year.

Strengthening Advising

In 2022, the College revitalized its partnership with the Meiklejohn Peer Advising Program for incoming students, pairing first-year students with a faculty or staff adviser and a trained student adviser to help navigate their transition to Brown. The College also built a dedicated study abroad advising team and began semester internship programs in Berlin, Sydney, and Washington, D.C.

To help students connect their college experience with the impact they want to make in the world, the College launched the Brown Center for Career Exploration in 2023 and the BrownConnect+ platform in 2024. Students can now access a growing team of dedicated career specialists and thousands of alumni and family mentors, industry liaisons, and potential employers to effectively explore a wider array of professional paths.

"The innovations the College has made over the last decade better empower undergraduates to be the architects of their own education," says Zia.

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